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SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

July 15, 2020

Holy Ground

Where is “Holy Ground” these days? I have heard people reflect that they are missing being present in their church sanctuary because that is where they have felt close to God. I understand that. I remember sitting in various sanctuaries that seemed to invoke a sense of the Holy. This experience provided assurance and peace. But it was also empowering. In Exodus, Moses saw a burning bush and God told him to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground (Ex. 3:5). But what makes ground holy? What makes a certain place holy? We know that Moses did not stay at that place. Rather, the experience launched him on his journey of leadership with a spirit of courage.



A church I had served used to sing “This is Holy Ground...because God is present and where God is, is holy.” Holy ground is connected to holy moments: whether in a sanctuary or on Zoom meetings; whether in the midst of a protest for justice or crying on the phone with someone who is feeling lonely and afraid; whether challenging a law that promotes inequality or delivering food to those who are unemployed. Taking the time to invoke God’s presence, centering our thoughts and awareness of God’s love for each person, can turn an ordinary experience into a holy experience.

As we keep moving through these challenging times, may we seek the presence of God in many places – whether physical places or in relationships. Moses did not remain in that safe place where the ground was holy. But it gave him the courage, the focus, the grounding that he

would take with him as he adapted to various situations, including challenging the forces of power. Although there were difficult moments, he never gave up.

May we seek that holy ground that will continue to move with us through this time, as we seek to listen for God's presence and feel God's assurance.

Blessings, Char Burch
Transitional Conference Minister

News from the Conference Office



Communities of Practice: An Exciting New Program for Clergy

The Commission on Ministry is pleased to announce a new initiative: "Communities of Practice" for our clergy. Clarice Mitchell, chair of Support and Nurture for the COM, says "we are very excited about the program because it can help clergy do their job better." The program was developed as part of the Pastoral Excellence initiative. It is dedicated to strengthening and sustaining excellent pastoral leaders for a lifetime of creative, effective service to the church.

Mitchell continues, "As a retired pastor, I know that it is not easy being a pastor since we wear so many hats. Also, it is often a lonely job and the

Communities of Practice ("COP") encourage lifetime friends among the other 5 or 6 participants in each group." Local pastors will benefit from this new program but so will chaplains and specialized ministers. We will have a COP just for them since their ministry is unique. They have certainly been on the front lines recently and feeling the stress of doing ministry.

Read the full interview with Clarice [on our website](#), and learn how to get involved in a Community of Practice.

Lay Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: An SEC Special Webinar – July 20

What kind of pressures are you as lay leaders experiencing? How do you work to make good decisions in today's virtual world? How do you support your pastor? We are living in challenging times and as lay leaders, your leadership is crucial. These days you may feel greater pressures of finances, moving to in-person worship, responding to individual complaints without the advantage of face-to-face meetings.

Moderators and other Lay Leaders are encouraged to join Rev. Char Burch (Transitional Conference Minister), for an hour of discussion on leadership during these unique times. 7 pm Eastern/6 pm Central. [Register for the Zoom session here](#).

Re-Opening of Churches – July 27

As situations regarding COVID-19 keep changing, moderators and church leaders are invited to join in the continued conversation about when and how church buildings re-open and in-person worship resumes. Everyone is welcome to join the conversation.

Join us on **Monday, July 27 at 7:00 pm Eastern / 6:00 pm Central** via Zoom. [Register online here](#).

Energizing Democracy – July 28

by Michael Malcom

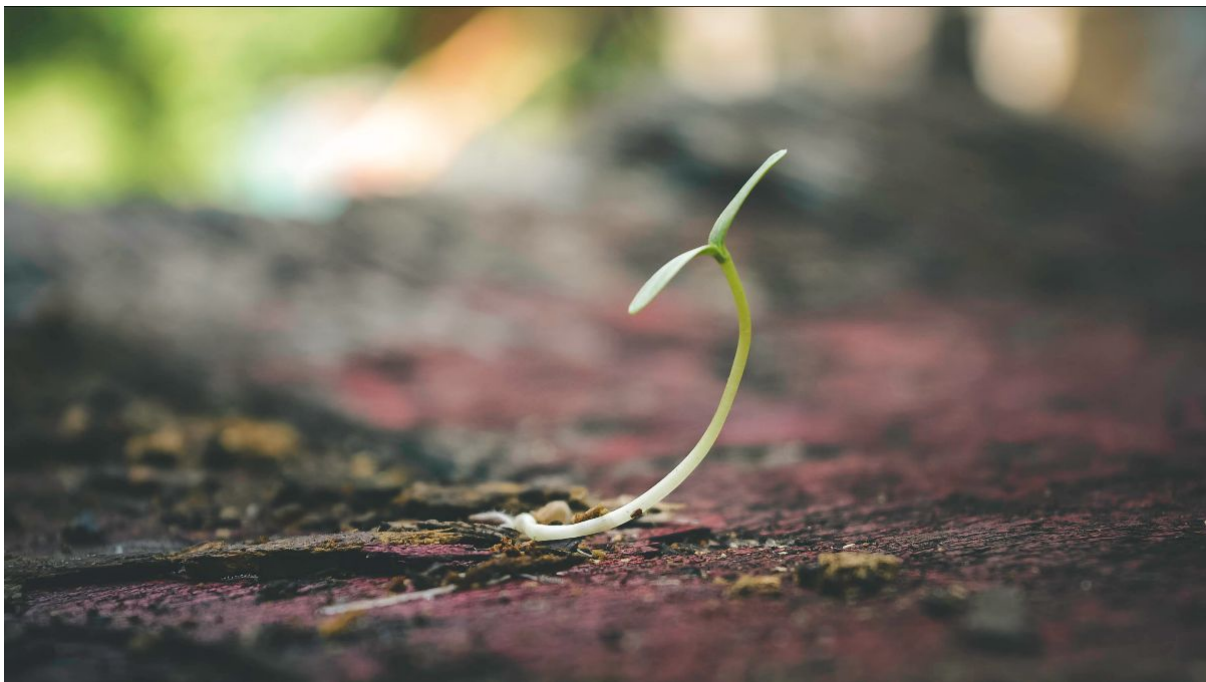
In a recent sermon, Rev Jennifer Sanders of Beloved UCC preached about things rising from the ashes. Although these are tense and uncertain times, many of us are either raising or finding our voice for justice. Some of us have even seen justice ministry emerge from the ashes. We are taking

stances against "othering" and stating emphatically that black lives matter.

I commend those who have seen placing your bodies on the line as a sacred rite. I'd like to invite you all to view injustice through an environmental justice lens. Join us on July 28 at 7 pm Eastern/6 pm Central as we discuss environmental racism and its effect on the church. [Register today for Energizing Democracy.](#)

Southeast Conference Annual Meeting - September 26

Because of the concern about COVID-19, the Board of Directors has decided to move the September Annual Meeting to a virtual event. Hold the date! Look for information next week with details and a link to registration.



What Gives You Hope? Submit Your Video Reflection!

We are living in some challenging times. But we are called to be a people of hope. So the midst of our current life, what do you see that gives you hope?

You are invited to create a 30-45 second video and send it to Don Harris, our Conference Communications Director. We will include videos in our upcoming Conference Connections as a reminder that because of our faith, we are people of hope.

Send your videos to communicationsdirector@secucc.org, text them to Don at 404-964-2474, or share a link to your Google Drive or OneDrive. We look

forward to your contributions!

For All Clergy

- **An Hour of Conversations and Prayer**
Tuesdays in July (21, 28) - 11:00 a.m. Eastern (10:00 a.m. Central)
Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/479440102>
 - **Especially for Specialized Ministers**
Tuesday, July 28: 9:30 a.m. Eastern (8:30 a.m. Central)
Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/354744689>
 - **Live Harp Meditations for Ministers**
Thursday, July 30: 1:00 p.m. Eastern (12:00 Central)
20 minutes of meditation with Celtic harp. Silent prayer and reflection following if desired, facilitated by Rev. Jean Norton. (For questions or to sign up for individual Therapeutic Harp Sessions, contact Jean at HeartSongJean@gmail.com.)
Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/96976838422>
-

Sermon Ideas for Clergy

Clergy, do you need a break from sermon preparation? Since many of our pastors are recording sermons, contact each other to share sermons! Or use a segment from one of the many videos being shared through webinars. If you're not already on our Southeast Conference [Clergy and Laity Facebook group](#), join and share ideas there!



Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2020. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of July 19

- Forgiving Heart Church; Columbus, GA
- Diantha Baker Brown
- Randy Hammer
- Thomas Query
- Ed Sunday Winters
- Patricia Keeler

Week of July 26

- Spirit of the Cross, Huntsville, AL
- Lacey Brown
- George Hartz
- Gerald Kummer
- Will Rabert, Jr

Churches in Transition

Central Congregational, Atlanta, GA; First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Open Table, Mobile AL; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA; United Church of Cookeville, Cookeville TN

News from the Wider Church

Innovative Ministries Webinars

The Council of Conference Ministers has been sponsoring a series of Innovative Ministries Webinars. This involves pastors and lay leaders who have been addressing issues in their local church or settings. Look for more information about the upcoming webinars:

- Wednesday, **July 22**, at 3 p.m. EDT: "Racism and While Privilege." Host: the Rev. Shana Johnson, [Illinois South Conference](#).
- Wednesday, **August 12**, at 3 p.m. EDT: "Digital Social Justice and Missions." Host: the Rev. Ginny Brown Daniel, [Missouri Mid-South Conference](#).

Previous UCC webinars on Worship and Care for the entire church can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/user/uccvideos/playlists>. UCC General Counsel Heather Kimmel was involved in a very informative webinar on "How to NOT Add an Unintended Legal Battle to your Church's Worries."



Insurance Board COVID-19 Resources

As your ministry navigates through COVID-19, you may find yourself looking for information to help your ministry continue to thrive. Click below to view our COVID-19 Resource Page, and sign-up to download our COVID-19 Toolkit. Insurance Board protects your ministry by offering resources to support it. For more information, [visit the COVID-19 Resource Page](#).

Saying No to Say Yes

The Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team is encouraging a book study for ministers on *Saying No to Say Yes* with Rev. Tara Barber and Rev. Stephen Boyd; July 22 at 7:00 pm EDT OR July 29 at 4:00 pm EDT. The book by authors David C. Olson and Nancy G. Devor, explores how ministers can say no to certain pressures in order to maintain healthy relationships within the congregation. After reading the book, ministers (limited to 25 at each session) are invited to join in the discussion. Following those conversations, MESA plans a later opportunity to reconvene with interested parties to discuss boundaries, parameters, and expectations for healthy Pastoral Relations Committees in their ministerial settings. To register, click [HERE](#) and choose the date you want to participate.

Pandemic Grants for Churches Still Available

The United Church of Christ National Setting is offering financial assistance to local churches whose ministries have been challenged by the novel coronavirus pandemic. As one, the national officers have collectively identified \$2.6 million in COVID-19 relief, \$1.5 million in loans that will be [administered through the Cornerstone Fund](#), and another \$1.1 million in micro-grants. Grant money will be available through the [process detailed on the UCC website](#).

We want to highlight one type of grant provided through UCC Disaster Ministries and is disbursed through the Southeast Conference. It is called UCC COVID-19 Conference Recovery Grant. This is specifically designed to meet the needs created or worsened due to COVID-19 in communities hardest hit by the pandemic. The grants aid churches in their efforts to provide assistance to individuals and families (not churches themselves).

The Conference actually needs to apply for the funds from Disaster Ministries. So please let the conference office know if your church could benefit from such a grant so that the Conference can make an application.

UCC launches "Recovering Hope," emotional care in COVID-19

Disasters are stressful for survivors and caregivers alike, including the pastors and chaplains to whom survivors turn for spiritual and practical help. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. This long-running disaster is taking an enormous emotional toll on millions of people, sparing no one as they and those around them suffer sickness and death, isolation and loss of community and livelihoods.

In response, a multidisciplinary United Church of Christ team is launching "Recovering Hope," which is rolling out resources for emotional and spiritual care to pastors, chaplains and other church leaders, congregants, vulnerable communities and beyond. "Recovering Hope" is offering resources, indexed at www.ucc.org/recovering_hope in a variety of formats, including virtual workshops, referrals to vetted providers, and other easily accessible resources from the UCC and beyond.

News from our Local Congregations

Ecclesiastical Council of Rev. Richard Barham

The Southeast Conference's Commission on Ministry invites you to the Ecclesiastical Council of Rev. Richard Barham, Senior Pastor of Spirit of the Cross UCC in Huntsville, AL. Ecclesiastical Councils (ECs) are the last step in the process for both Members in Discernment and for Ministers transferring their credentials to the United Church of Christ from another denomination called the Privilege of Call. As part of the EC, Southeast Conference members will have the opportunity to hear about Rev. Barham's ministry and call to the United Church of Christ.



As part of the EC, you, members of the Southeast Conference, will have the opportunity to listen to the work of the Spirit, and vote to welcome Rev. Barham into the UCC as a fully authorized ordained minister. Rev. Barham currently serves as Senior Pastor of Spirit of the Cross UCC in Huntsville, AL, a congregation that affiliated with the UCC in October 2018. This EC will be online and you can [register here](#) to attend on August 4th at 6 pm Eastern, 5 pm Central.

Remembering Rev. Michael Garrett

It is with great sadness that we bid farewell to Reverend Michael Garrett, the Associate Pastor of Unity UCC in Montgomery, where Reverend Bennie Liggins is Senior Pastor.

Reverend Garrett was the former Pastor of First Congregational UCC, Montgomery where he served for more than seventeen (17) years.

(This article submitted by Rev Dorinda Broadnax with permission granted by Pastor Bennie Liggins of Unity UCC)

Training and Learning Opportunities

ONA Webinars Continue

From the Open and Affirming Coalition

We've extended our [webinar series](#) for ONA and not-yet ONA congregations through this summer! With churches still unable to meet, this is an online opportunity to plan for your congregation's future. It's part of our "Summer of Hope" programming, along with daily online worship

and weekly celebrations of new ONA churches. Our discounted rates allow any number of participants from your church to log in separately, and our season pass gives full access to the rest of the webinar series. If you've missed any of the earlier webinars, [write us](#) and we'll be glad to schedule a special session for your church!

Conference Calendar

Middle TN Clergy Gathering

July 16 @ 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm EDT ([Click here to join](#))

Commission on Ministry Meeting

July 16 @ 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm EDT

Lay Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times

July 20 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EDT ([Click here to join](#))

Clergy Conversations via Zoom

Tuesday, July 21 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT ([Click here to join](#))

PAM Team Meeting

July 21 @ 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm EDT

Re-Opening of Churches – Conversation for all Church Leaders

Monday, July 27 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EDT ([Register online here](#))

Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers

Tuesday, July 28 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EDT ([Click here to join](#))

Clergy Conversations via Zoom

Tuesday, July 28 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT ([Click here to join](#))

Environmental Justice Conversation

July 28 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EDT ([Click here to join](#))

Live Harp Meditations for Ministers

Thursday, July 30 @ 1:00 pm EDT ([Click here to join](#))

View the **full calendar** of events online: <https://www.secucc.org/events/>

Contact Us

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